Natvarlalji & The Nagdaman Leela

Natvarlalji:Meaning:

The name Natvarlalji is a combination of several Sanskrit words. ‘Nat’ means dancer (Krishna dances on the hood of Kaliya, the snake). ‘Var’ means ‘best’. In this context, ‘lal’ means essence and ‘ji’ is used to show our reverence to the deity. So the name “Natvarlalji” means, the essence of the best dancer.

Krishna is addressed as “Natvarlalji” in the Venu Geet too. There are 20 shlokas/songs about Natvarlalji in the Venu Geet, in Srimad Bhagwat.

Natvarlalji’s idol was first found in the waters of the Yamuna. Vallabhacharya asked his son Gusainji to perform the seva of this idol. Later on, Girdharji, Gusainji’s senior-most son continued with the seva. This idol is currently enshrined in a temple in Ahmadabad.

Natvarlalji’s Nagdaman Leela

Nagdaman is a combination of two Sanskrit words, Nag, a snake and Daman means overpower. Leela, in this context means grace. So Nagdaman leela is the story of how Krishna showers his grace on his friends by overpowering Kaliya, the snake.

A rishi called Kashyapa marries several daughters of Daksha Prajapati, the mind-born son of Brahma. Two of his wives Kadru and Vinata ask him to bless them with children. Kadru asks for a thousand children. Vinata asks him for two strong children. Rishi Kashyapa promises to fulfil their wishes.

In due course of time, Kadru lays a thousand small eggs and Vinata lays two big ones. Kadru’s eggs hatch first and a thousand snakes (nagas) are born. The most powerful amongst these snakes are SheshaNag, Vasuki and Takshak. Vishnu reclines on SheshaNag, the cosmic Timekeeper. Kaliya, a snake with several hoods is also one of Kadru’s children.

Vinata becomes impatient. She wonders why her two eggs are taking so long to hatch. She pricks one of her eggs open. Aruna, a half-formed child

emerges out of it and curses her. He says, “You will be Kadru’s slave for several years.”Aruna is the charioteer of Surya, the sun god. Vinata’s second son Garuda hatches after several years. Garuda is half man and half eagle, the natural enemy of snakes and the vahan of Vishnu.

One day, Garuda flies to a far off place to find food for himself. He comes across the river Yamuna. He swoops down and starts feeding on the fishes that are swimming around in the river.

A rishi called Saubhari lives in a hut on the banks of the Yamuna. He hears the plaintive cries of the fishes. They know Garuda will eat them all in no time. Rishi Saubhari asks Garuda to find food for himself elsewhere. He asks him not to eat so many fishes from the same spot. But Garuda is too busy feasting on the fishes. He does not pay any attention to rishi Saubhari’s words.

Rishi Saubhari is annoyed by Garuda’s behaviour and curses him. He says, “If you ever come back to this spot again, you will die for sure.” Garuda flies away quickly when he hears rishi Saubhari’s words. He never comes that way again.

The nagas laugh amongst themselves when they hear about Garuda’s curse. But they don’t discuss it with him because they know Garuda is much stronger than all of them put together.

The nagas and Garuda always share all the food that is offered to them equally. But one day, Kaliya, decides to keep all the offerings for himself. Garuda loses his temper when he comes to know about this. He starts fighting with Kaliya. Kaliya knows he can never match Garuda’s strength. He flees to the spot near rishi Saubhari’s hermitage to save himself from Garuda’s wrath. He fears for his life. He knows Garuda will never spare him if he leaves that spot. So he decides to stay there, in a small bend of Yamuna.

Kaliya starts preying on the fish and all the other creatures that he finds around him. He feasts on them at will and starts spreading his poison in the waters of Yamuna too.

Krishna and his cowherd friends live along the banks of Yamuna. One day, a few of Krishna's friends decide to take a dip in the waters of the Yamuna. Soon they start screaming for help. After a while, they disappear. The other friends rush to seek Krishna's help.

Krishna knows that Kaliya, the naga, is up to his mischief again. He tucks his flute into his waist and enters the waters of the Yamuna. He engages in a fierce battle with Kaliya. Kaliya does not recognize Krishna. He thinks Krishna is a mere boy, an ordinary cowherd and definitely no match for his strength. He attacks Krishna and tries to poison him.

But Krishna dives deep into the waters of Yamuna. He emerges out of the water, holding his tail aloft. He takes the flute from his waist and starts playing on it. He continues to dance on each of Kaliya's many hoods blissfully – oblivious to the entire world. Kaliya realizes that this cowherd boy called Krishna is none other than Vishnu himself. He wonders if Krishna would kill him. He is scared but he bows down to him and asks Krishna several questions.

Kaliya says, "O Krishna. You are the creator of this world. I know you will kill me. But please tell me what my fault is before you kill me? Is it wrong to feed on fish when I am hungry? You have created poisonous snakes like me. Is it not in my nature to spread poison wherever I go?"

Krishna looks at him and says, "You don't deserve death Kaliya. But you have disturbed the balance within the waters of the Yamuna. You should have used your poison only to defend yourself. Not to create fear in the hearts of all the creatures that live in this area. You don't deserve to live here anymore. You will have to go back to Patal loka. That is the only rightful place for you." Kaliya nods his head. His pride is vanquished. He bows down silently before Krishna and descends to Patal loka. This

incident, Krishna’s “Nagadaman Leela”, is the essence of Natvarlalji’s swaroop.

The nuances of all the characters in this story synchronize beautifully. Vinata becomes impatient when her efforts bear no fruit. Garuda takes more than his fair share of food. And Kaliya feasts on food that rightfully belongs to Garuda.

Krishna watches all this from afar. Quietly. Soberly. And when things come to a head, Krishna transforms into Natvarlalji, plays his cosmic dance in all their lives and puts them in their rightful place. Yes. There is a lot we can learn from Natvarlalji’s Nagdaman leela. We too have to face the consequences of our actions at some point of time in our lives. Natvarlalji ensures that Dharma prevails. Always. So let’s temper all our actions with patience, fairness and follow the path of Dharma to the best of our ability.